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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 001363

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: USG ANNOUNCES CONTRIBUTION TO SUPPORT
PALESTINIAN REFUGEES, OTHERS DON'T

REF: BEIRUT 1229

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reason 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) At a September 11 donors conference, the USG announced a \$17.81 million pledge to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide relief and reconstruction assistance to displaced Nahr al-Barid camp refugees. The U.S. was the only donor to make a pledge; and some key potential donors, such as the Gulf states, were absent from the conference. UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi warned in his remarks that failure to reconstruct the camp or provide relief to the refugees could lead to violence and extremism in the area.

2. (C) In a separate meeting, Grandi supported an initiative by the GOL and PLO representative in Lebanon to visit the Gulf states to raise funds for Nahr al-Barid. He requested western donors to confirm the status of earlier pledges and whether or not they planned to make additional contributions. To date, UNRWA has received \$41.8 million of the \$70 million thus far pledged for reconstruction. The amount pledged which will cover the construction costs for 2 out of 8 neighborhoods, or "packages," in the camp and the management and design contract. Grandi warned that a design problem could throw the project off track seven to twelve months.
End Summary.

USG PUTS ITS MONEY
WHERE ITS MOUTH IS

3. (SBU) On September 11, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) launched its 16-month Relief and Recovery Appeal for Nahr al-Barid camp refugees displaced in fighting between the LAF and Fatah al-Islam militants in June-September 2007. At the conference, The Ambassador announced a new USG contribution of \$17.81 million. Of this money, \$4.31 million is for the relief appeal and \$13.5 million for Nahr al-Barid reconstruction. (Note: At the June Vienna donors' conference, the USG pledged \$10 million to UNRWA for camp

reconstruction and an additional \$12 million in funding for revitalization projects to the surrounding Lebanese communities (\$6 million) and for a community policing program (\$6 million) within the camp. UNRWA and the GOL are seeking \$42.7 million for the Relief Appeal and \$445 million for the Reconstruction Appeal. End Note.)

14. (SBU) The U.S. was the only donor to make a pledge at the September 11 conference. Overall donor attendance was poor. There were only two Ambassadors (the U.S. and Canada) and three foreign assistance mission directors at the event. Many donors did not attend (Germany, UK, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait).

15. (SBU) The conference opened with heartfelt pleas by refugees displaced from Nahr al-Barid camp. One 12-year-old girl said "my house was destroyed, turned into rubble; I lost all my toys, my books, and the precious gifts my friends had given me. On behalf of every child, I thank you for your help." Ambassador Makkawi, Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) President, hoped that the start of construction in Nahr al-Barid would send a positive message to donors who have not yet contributed. He said the GOL is

BEIRUT 00001363 002 OF 004

following up with Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar and looked forward to a "positive response" from them. The GOL, he added, remains committed to returning the refugees to a fully reconstructed camp.

17. (SBU) UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi highlighted the urgency of continuing UNRWA's relief efforts. He noted that 70 percent of displaced refugee families depend entirely on UNRWA for shelter accommodation. If additional contributions are not forthcoming in the next 2-3 months, these refugee families will again be homeless, Grandi added. He also said 79 percent of the Nahr al-Barid refugee workforce is unemployed (it was less than 30 percent before the Nahr al-Barid conflict) and is particularly pronounced among youth. Grandi warned that unemployment will provide a fertile ground for violence and extremism if conditions for Nahr al-Barid refugees do not improve.

GULF STATES NEED
TO DO THEIR PART

18. (C) In separate September 12 meetings with RefCoord and PolOff, both Ambassador Makkawi and Filippo Grandi reiterated the need for Arab countries to step up to the plate, noting that none of the four major Gulf donors had yet pledged money for reconstruction or relief. (Note: PM Siniora had expressed in June that the Gulf states would pay for half of the \$445 million cost of rebuilding the camp. End Note.) Grandi was also concerned about the Arab donors' absence from the September 11 conference.

19. (C) Makkawi said that he and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas had agreed to send a joint PLO-GOL delegation to Riyadh, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Doha to make their cases to the Gulf leaders (reftel). UNRWA's Grandi suggested that the joint delegation should undertake this mission immediately to take advantage of the charitable giving aspect of the Ramadan season with the first port of call in Saudi Arabia. If the Saudis make a pledge, Kuwait and UAE would be sure to follow, he added. Grandi opined, however, that Gulf countries may be reluctant to support the reconstruction appeal for political reasons. (Note: Grandi did not elaborate, but may mean that the Saudis want to steer clear from being accused of supporting "tawteen," or permanent resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. End Note.) If this is the case, Grandi said, perhaps the Gulf donors would be more willing to donate to the relief appeal because it is humanitarian aid, not reconstruction assistance. Grandi noted that EU Ambassadors in Lebanon told him that they had written to their UN Missions, asking that they demarche Gulf state delegations at the upcoming UN General Assembly meeting.

WESTERN DONATIONS
OKAY FOR NOW

110. (SBU) Grandi added that he was not concerned that

traditional Western donors would fail to contribute to UNRWA's relief and reconstruction effort. Some donors, such as the Japanese, Dutch, and the EU's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), had expressed interest, but had informed UNRWA that the September conference did not time well with their funding cycles. In addition, Grandi said, he expects the Germans to make a \$1 million contribution in the coming weeks. He said the USG contribution would serve as a bridge until that time; but, noted that UNRWA would have to stretch this money as far as possible in the expectation that the German donation would

BEIRUT 00001363 003 OF 004

come through. Grandi said it would be useful for donors to indicate to UNRWA whether or not they can make a pledge and when, so that UNRWA could plan the reconstruction and relief programs according to projected funding.

LAND EXPROPRIATION HELD UP DUE
TO INFRINGEMENT ON PUBLIC DOMAIN

11. (SBU) In the technical session following the September 11 appeal launch, GOL Technical Advisor Sateh Arnaout reported to donors that the draft land expropriation decree is "well-advanced." The budget is available to expropriate the 29 privately-held plots that make up the refugee camp. The remaining hurdle, he said, was negotiating with UNRWA on the camp's infringement on the coastal road, which is public domain land. The Master Plan for Reconstruction retained the same footprint that existed before the 2007 conflict and, therefore, includes the encroached areas.

12. (SBU) According to Grandi, revising the Master Plan would impact the design of the entire camp, and would cause a 7 to 12-month delay and lead to frustration among refugees who had been involved in the planning and design process. UNRWA's new Director for Lebanon Operations, Salvatore Lombardo, said that UNRWA's suggested compromise is to redirect the road by 20 to 30 feet, so the new camp will not encroach on the road. This process will not require additional land expropriations by the GOL (a politically sensitive issue), because the redirected road will cut into property already given to UNRWA, he added.

RECONSTRUCTION
UPDATE

13. (SBU) During the technical session of the conference, UNRWA Nahr al-Barid Project Manager Henri Disselkonen reported that UNRWA has received \$41.8 million out of \$70 million in pledged contributions. He noted that, since Vienna, all rubble has been cleared from the UNRWA compound in the camp, the design for one "Package," or neighborhood, is complete, and UNRWA has signed contracts for rubble removal and de-mining. The selection of a management and design consultant is in progress and the GOL has approved rubble removal in the old camp to begin on September 25. De-mining activities will be coordinated in parallel with rubble removal. Henri also noted that 22 UXO were found in the UNRWA compound (3 of them exploded in the course of de-mining). So, the projected timeline of 14 - 18 months to remove the rubble removal from the camp, which will start in the worst contaminated areas, could go longer if the de-mining is tougher than expected.

14. (SBU) Henri explained that UNRWA had divided Nahr al-Barid camp into 8 "packages." The \$70 million in pledged funding will allow for construction of Package 1, which includes 120 buildings for 399 family shelters, and Package 2, which includes 330 buildings for 1,029 families. Package 1 will also include the infrastructure for both Package 1 and 2 as well as the off-site infrastructure for the entire camp, such as the water supply system and waste water connections. Pre-qualification for construction companies for Package 1 will begin in October, the contract will be tendered in December and construction itself is scheduled to begin in January 2009. Package 1 will hopefully be ready for occupancy by November 2009.

COMMENT

BEIRUT 00001363 004 OF 004

¶15. (C) Beirut opposition daily nea)PQack of donor pledges had been "insulting...perhaps because it is Ramadan and most Arabs sleep." It is not clear why the Gulf countries have yet to make pledges this year. We will urge Makkawi to initiate his visit to Gulf countries as soon as possible and will encourage PM Siniora to adopt the UNRWA plan for Nahr al-Barid camp design. Grandi's warning of increased violence in the already volatile area of the north, where Nahr al-Barid is located, is particularly troubling and may warrant a strong USG push to encourage Arab nations to provide some type of assistance to the Palestinian refugee community in this region to avoid any escalation in tension and violence. End Comment.

SISON